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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the avenues for choosing pictures and visual images in testing situations for foreign and second language examinations. The paper demonstrates how quantitative and qualitative research from cognitive psychology, visual and verbal behavior studies, as well as Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) have contributed to the understanding of how visual images affect background schemata, learning, and testing. It is essential that test writers investigate how visuals and images can aid or hinder the assessment of language learning. It is hoped that this research will help the classroom practitioner, the materials developer, and most importantly the test writer/designer to choose, use, create, design and implement pictures into testing procedures, which are fair to the student population and offer a more accurate measure of a learner's ability to manipulate and communicate in the target language. It is concluded that a learner's sensitivity to language and the ability to create relations amongst words can be further enhanced by the use of visuals. (Contains 32 references.) (KFT)

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Choosing EFL/ESL Visual Assessments: Image and Picture Selection on Foreign and Second Language Exams

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1.0 Abstract:

This purpose of this paper is to discuss the avenues for choosing pictures and visual images in testing situations for foreign and second language examinations. The paper demonstrates how quantitative and qualitative research from cognitive psychology, visual and verbal behavior studies, as well as TEFL have contributed to the understanding of how visual images affect background schemata, learning and testing. Therefore, as test writers, researchers and classroom teachers, it is essential that we investigate how visuals and images can aid or hinder the assessment of language learning. It is hoped that the information put forth in the paper will help the classroom practitioner, materials developer and most importantly, the test writer/designer to choose, use, create, design and implement pictures into testing procedures, which are fair to the student population and which offer a more accurate measure of a learner's ability to manipulate and communicate in the target language.

2.0 Introduction:

Almost all-psychological research agrees that visual cues are important, since they either facilitate or distract from understanding. It is through greater understanding, that people are able to use signs and symbols such as letters to form words, which later strung together form sentences and thus, allow mankind to communicate. As test writers, it is our duty to measure in language, abilities of understanding and communication,whether it is in a first or second language.

The use of pictures and visual images has been under-researched in the area of foreign and second language learning. Studies using visuals have been even more scant in the areas of TEFL testing and evaluation. However, in the areas of cognitive psychology

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and visual/verbal behavior, the number of qualitative and quantitative study have been plentiful. These studies have offered insightful data to how people learn a first language and in some instances a second or third language.

Psychology, as well as TEFL, can easily argue that there is a wide variety of interesting questions that can be posited in connection with the topic of imagery in foreign language learning and even more in the areas of foreign language testing. However, thus far, research in human learning in relationship to visuals and the application to foreign and second language testing has provided answers to only a few.

ACER, PET, Bogora, SPEAK and TOEIC tests as well as many teacher designed tests use visuals, video, and imagery depictions as discriminators to measure a learner's mastery of the English language. With such little empirical research available, it is fair to question and challenge the methods of picture selection for tests. *Awareness is the key.*

For example, during a testing lecture I attended, a picture was shown to demonstrate a sample question used to distinguish a learner's ability to use and communicate in the target language. After working for so long in the Arab world, I was aghast to see a man holding a bottle (by shape it could be assumed to hold alcohol – although it was only implied) with his dog fishing at a lake in what appeared to be Norway or Alaska, based on the large fjords in the background. This picture was being used to generate speech for a standardized exam with Arabs who live in a desert of sand with no lakes. Although the lecturer felt this picture could elicit speech, I felt it was culturally inappropriate and based on the literature could actually hinder the student's ability to produce language. For this picture was shown to students who lived in a semi-closed society with little exposure to the western world. The animal, a dog, is not favored by the target culture taking the

exam because it is conceptualized as being unclean in their holy book. Ice capped mountains are not conceivable in an area that can have summers as hot as 50 degrees Celsius. On the surface, a student with a basic vocabulary could discuss the picture, but at what depth? Was the basic expectation that a student could describe the picture at a bare bones level or was the student being denied the chance to discuss a picture in depth with a culture and venue that he/she was more aware of and associated with? It turned out the basic expectation was that the student could talk about the picture with as much gumption as a European, who would have more exposure to the situation.

When audience participants questioned the picture, the immediate response was that you could expose students to things just because they don't exist in their culture. This is true and I agree with the lecturer, but the exposure should be in a classroom and not on a high-stakes exam. -Likewise, another two examples came up during the lecture that I also found questionable, and a final picture, which made me, think what could I say about it as a native speaker? Although I am the type of person who could talk your ear off in a conversation, the picture did not motivate me to think up more than a few basic associative sentences because I could not relate to it and it left little to the imagination.

Unfortunately, test writers often get wrapped up into the test and the results that they forget the client or learner. In my opinion, the culture, educational background and work experience of the test writer, often influences and yields the views and beliefs reflected in the type of exam. It is not to say that one exam type is better than another or that one way of thinking is superior to another, but rather to suggest that these factors must be considered by the writer when selecting test questions, formats and self-analyzing one's institution or performance in test design. To solely, promote an Anglo-

file view on an exam is a disservice to the test taker. For example, in the Arab world, contrary to the literature and research, language can be successfully taught without teaching or testing the target culture. This is why standardized tests such as TOEIC is so widely recognized because it lacks cultural domination and offers a more fair assessment of a student's language ability against others who may not have a similar background than that of other standardized exams given to language learners.

2.1 Basic Testing Assumptions in Relationship to the Literature Review

In 1996, former Testing and Measurements Supervisor, Dr. Christine Coombe of UAE University and now, of the Higher Colleges of Technology in Dubai, offered a series of workshops ranging from CGEs, Statistics, Format Design and other issues related to testing to increase the awareness of how teachers in the Gulf should be designing and creating classroom and standardized tests for students. Although the majority of her workshops and seminars were advanced, she still rooted her self in the basics of the four cornerstones of good testing practice, by always focusing on practicality, washback, reliability, and validity. More importantly, she hammered home the point that as testers, **we must test what we teach.** This is the first of many basic assumptions that as test designers we must implement. As we delve deeper into this paper, this concept will also apply to the visuals and images we create when writing examinations.

The second issue, before beginning the paper that we must examine, is how testing influences language teaching. The forerunning experts in testing, Alderson and Wall,

theorize a washback hypothesis between assessment and its relationship to teaching and learning. In their cornerstone article, Alderson and Wall (1993) directly state:

- A test will influence teaching.
- A test will influence learning.
- A test will influence what teachers teach.
- A test will influence what learners learn.
- A test will influence how a teacher teaches.
- A test will influence how a learner learns.
- A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching.
- A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning.
- A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching.
- A test will influence the degree and depth of learning.
- A test will influence attitudes to the content, method, etc. teaching and learning.

Tests that have important consequences will have washback.

- Tests that do not have important consequences will not have washback.
- Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers.
- Tests will have washback effects for some learners and not for others.

However, other additional factors beyond those stated by Anderson and Wall, affect learning, teaching and testing. Other influences and variables, depending program to program, must be entered into the testing process in order to understand how a test impacts learning, teaching, curriculum and/or administrative practices. Canning

(2000/2001) argued other factors included, but were not subjected or limited to the following, in addition to the fundamental theory of Anderson and Wall:

- How a test influences washback/feedback for teaching and learning is dependent on each individual program and its curriculum.
- A test is only a test. It is not necessarily the reflection of one's ability to understand all information. Scores reflect the results to a set of predisposed questions.
- The type of test written may reflect internal standards of a set curriculum or program.
- A set of test questions may be reliable and valid sources to create an assessment instrument, even if the grading of the instrument is invalid or unreliable.
- Criteria used to classify a test as the piloting or non-piloting of test question influences a valid and reliable instrument.
- Administrative constraints time limitations and course content influence teaching.
- Administrative constraints time limitations and course content influence learning.
- Grading criteria influence teaching practices as well as learning practices.
- Implementing grading internationally recognized criteria influences standards.
- Testing influences the impact of grading practices and policies both in and out of the examination environment.
- Grading influences the impact of testing.
- Training of teachers to grade consistently with standards impacts the quality of test results and exam preparation.
- The lack of training to grade consistently with standards impacts the quality of test results and exam preparation.

- Testing without proper statistical analysis can lead to incomplete feedback.
- Descriptive statistics can be manipulated and may not offer authentic feedback into the teaching, learning and testing process.
- Changes in policies, procedures or styles of grading on a test will influence scores. Scores that do not reflect consistency cannot give proper feedback to a program.
- Task type will influence learning, teaching and testing.
- Grading to standard will warrant better accuracy into the goals of teaching and learning.
- Standardized grading practices will positively influence and impact testing, teaching and learning.
- Non- standardized grading practices will negatively influence and impact testing, teaching and learning.

How do these factors affect the practices of markers scoring English written exams? Canning (2000/2001) argues:

First, poor training or in-house training can lead to standards, which are not based on the literature. Secondly, it can standardize standards, which should never have been put into practice in the first place. Finally, it can potentially lead to abuses and a lack of consistency, which in turn can give a testing program insufficient or inaccurate results, a teacher a wrong washback of what material has been learned by the student and an unfair benchmark or grade to the learner of what he/she has mastered in the language classroom.

2.2 Literature Review

The concept of defining what constitutes a visual is by nature complex. A visual is any projected or non-projected image that can be classified into illustrations, visuals, pictures, perceptions, mental images, figures, impressions, likeness, replicas, reproductions or anything that would help a learner see an immediate meaning (Canning-Wilson 1997; 1998; 2000). The visual is considered projected when it is planned for and executed with an intended meaning. In contrast, the non-projected visual is the result of a spontaneous occurrence of an image that is usually unplanned and occurs in relationship as a result of a triggered catalyst (Canning-Wilson, 2000).

However, Canning-Wilson (2001; 2000) warns that there is considerable confidence placed in the value of audio-visual aids to enhance the learning of foreign languages. Yet, she argues that there is little empirical data and research to support the proposition that video or visuals facilitate in the learning of foreign languages and even fewer data to show such images are valid and reliable in testing situations. Despite the lack of data, video and pictorial images are used on many tests to measure language proficiency.

Recognizable constraints on visual/language studies completed over the past two-decades show that there are several limitations to be recognized when examining results. Therefore, it is only fair to ask: What is the validity and reliability for interpretive purposes on the learner's part and measurable accuracy on the test writers' accord? How then does testing affect the use of visual aids as discriminators on examinations? Is the practice an ethical and fair assessment of what a learner has mastered or acquired in the second or foreign language? More and more research is saying yes there is a connection, provided it is carefully assessed for cultural sensitivity and overall usefulness. Omaggio (1979) believes that researchers in order to find valid results would need to ask whether

or not the same findings would hold true in different languages. With such unanswered questions, hypotheses and theories, yet to be proven with quantitative measures, practitioners and test writers must ask themselves is there sufficient evidence to support continued use of visual aids in the testing of foreign languages?

Researchers such as MacLeod (1980) argue a relationship between the process of comprehending a linguistic statement corresponding to a visual scene. Over the years this ideas has intrigued psychologists because it seems to be an important element in many kinds of mental activity of two forms of stimuli converting to internal representations. Macleod's studies have involved participants verifying or rejecting simple linguistic statements with an equivalent description of a simple picture. His findings show that it takes longer to verify complex statements depending on its linguistic complexity. If this is true, questions must be asked whether variables associated with the picture or visual cues affect the outcome of the answer or does language recognition play a far stronger role?

Studies such as those completed by Cronin and Myers (1997) demonstrate that quantitative research has shown no significant difference between two treatment groups between the cognitive test scores and listening test gain scores for student using multimedia IMI with visuals versus multimedia IMI with no visuals. Rather their research implied that information presented visually and verbally is represented differently in memory. Instead, it suggests that connections be formed within the re-visual and verbal representations and referential connections. If this is the case, then it can be suggested that pictures have the ability to influence testing practices, but not overrule test discriminators based solely on paralinguistic cues.

How pictures influence learning and testing practices must be examined at a deeper level in order to ensure Caulfield and Smith (1983) coin genuine validity. Genuine validity helps the test taker to see and communicate with the exam in a more realistic environment. As the visual supplement or cue the language being communicate within the test with the test- taker is a part of the examination, it is fair to assume that genuine validity should then be inclusive to the visual representation as well. Perhaps this is because visuals affect the sensory modes in which a mental representation is stored. Research has shown the more likely the familiarity with the image; the more likely it will be remembered (Borsook. Higginbotham &Wheat, 1992). It is this kind of information, which enhances the argument that visual cueing, should be used more in foreign and second language testing, especially in the area of TEFL.

Canning-Wilson (2001) undertook a preliminary study in the Spring of 1997 at the University General Requirements Unit at United Arab Emirates University. 145 Female students on the Maqam Campus were asked to write an essay about a technical item called a "Blender". Group A was given a visual graphic of a blender in the upper right hand corner and the directions, which read: Please write a paragraph about the function of a blender. Group B was given only the direction without any visual reference. All classes that semester were exposed to kitchen items in the classification unit and description unit of the curriculum. Spelling, grammar and mechanics had no influence on the results of the study. The study was interested in whether or not the visual aided in the writing prompt. The preliminary data of the study revealed that 93% of the candidates who were given the prompt with a picture were able to describe the blender. Only 52% of the participants who did not have a visual stimulus were able to write about the basic

descriptions of the blender. The significant difference at the .001 level suggests that pictorial supplements can aid in helping jog the memory and make more educated choices on foreign and second language exams.

How many times have you taken an exam, known the answer, but can't think of the word to put down on the paper? Our memories have failed us with the linguistic answer. The words vanish, but the image of what we are looking for does not. Perhaps this explains why the research by Bagget (1989) posits that images are stored and can be retrieved easier in memory. The research suggests these images contain more information because they have more cognitive pegs that can be used to make associative and referential connections between visual representations and information held in long term memory. This research suggests learners employ dual coding to construct a mental model of the learning experience. Therefore, it can be implied that visuals may evoke relevant knowledge for those that have it to draw on. It is then assumed that most learners will integrate available symbol systems (visual, audio and/or text) to construct or elaborate on a model of the situation as a strategy to recreate in their mind a picture image of an event. Thus, benefiting the learner by offering more opportunity to express him or herself in the target language being tested.

However, considerations such as age, motivation, cultural background, and language ability must be taken into consideration. For example, Moore (1989) shows that children tend to use the strategy based on phonemic coding; whereas, adults used a "mental mode" strategy. Since adults use a mental mode or an analog representation of the structure, the selection of a visual in a testing situation must differ than that given to a young learner who uses phonemic coding as a way to decipher meaning and express

language. This is because whether perceived or conceived the model(s) represent the item being described with descriptive language for the learner. If as a test designer, you implement a question suggesting that the pen is in front of the glass, and then you ask the learner to draw upon the experience from a selection of pictorial discriminators, it can be presumed that the image becomes symbolic and does not necessarily need to be in the form of quasi-pictorial images in order for the student to answer the test-question.

Further study has shown, such as in Kosslyn's (1981) revolutionary article that there exists a computational theory of images, which states that visual and mental images are transitory data structures that occur in an analogue of spatial medium. The theory is described in terms of detailed claims about the mental structures and processes invoked during imagery. When a stimulus is terminated suddenly, some of the information emanating from the stimulus continues to be available in the nervous system for about a second after termination. If this is true, issues such as the design and length of a visual discriminator with a test taker must be further examined.

Test writers and designers must also take into consideration how people can construct a mental representation from the semantic meaning of a story from either audio or visual information alone before randomly designing exams or creating items for future use with language learners. Furthermore, test writers have other considerations to factor in before using pictures to test language ability. For example, some children recall sounds and expressive language from the audio track and visual details from the visual track. If this is true, test designers, writers and vetters must look at how these types of details affect test construction in order to offer a fair question to learners.

3.0 Practical Applications to TEFL/TESL Testing

To use visuals in the context of language learning, one must subscribe to the following assumptions:

1. Imagery can facilitate learning.
2. Imagery (combined with the use of texts) make subjects more likely to think about the process of the language more fully.

Imagery may hinder language learning. For example, imagery has been known to interfere with performance in various concurrent visual tasks. Picture associations on tests must be relevant to the learner in his first language and culture in order to be fair and effective when applied to his second language. Is it fair to test a female Arabic speaker from Saudi Arabia on the pictorial image of a meeting of men and women in a nightclub for a drink? To test her on what happens between a man and a woman who are not married when her society is segregated and foreign to such cultural concepts? Conceptually, it is unfair; however, it is possible on standardized Anglo-file examinations. Likewise, relating to the image or picture, to something the student is familiar with in his or her first language or culture, is as important as the association between the materials used and the learner who interprets them.

Relating language and remembering language can be strengthened through pictorial images. In 2000 and 2001, a comprehensive study of test data was collected and analyzed on a Catholic School's Latin program. The results of the study yielded a letter grade difference in same class scores, with the average mean being raised 8 points, when

picture mnemonics were introduced into the lesson and later into the exam to enhance the mastery of vocabulary, stem roots and endings (Kotski-Canning 2000/2001).

Earlier in 1987, Cohen's intriguing research looked at verbal and imagery encoding mnemonics, whereby verbal material and visual imagery served as cognitive mediators. His work indicates that in the second stage of mnemonics, known as keyboard mnemonics, images are associated with words in a foreign language. This imagery link is an intended result. It assumes that an encounter with the foreign word will evoke the keyword, which in turn reveals the imagery link and finally the native language equivalent. The word can then be retrieved from this interaction by forming a mental image linking the ideas. Likewise, research by Pressley, Levin and Delany (1982) show that data indicates that there is a slight advantage in favor of imagery mnemonics over verbal mnemonics. If this is the case, perhaps images should be further incorporated into foreign and second language examinations.

3.1 Practical Applications to Skill Area Testing:

As testers, we must ask: Can the visual symbol integrate itself into the skill areas and testing practices? I think it is feasible, if proper attention is taken to the visual images that influence the test. For example, let's start with the basic skill of reading. As stated before, letters are symbols. They stand for a sound and when put together with other "letters/symbols, they form meaning through recognizable words. Words become

visual symbols and clues, which can aid in the written communication. Thus, reading is usually defined as extraction of meaning from text" (Gibson and Levin 1975).

Even if test writers don't use physical pictures, conceptually the use of font and font size with the lettering and wording must be considered. As an image, it is what the reader sees as a symbolic graphic. Thus, thinking of the writing as a symbolic visual is important for test designer because as research has shown the use of representational visuals to supplement the orthographic symbols of text generally increases recall of illustrated text information. (Issing et all 1989; Kuntz eta l 1989; Livie et all 1982 Levin 1987; Peeck 1987; Pressley 1987; Stone 1981)

As Ehrilich and Johnson-Laird (1982) show adults interpret spatial descriptions by constructing mental models of them. Likewise they suggest that an alternative strategy may be used to encode descriptions verbatim and then try to represent them overtly, one sentence at a time. This practice must be taken very seriously when designing a test item and discriminator in order to ensure proper validity and reliability.

If we think of the printed word as a collection of symbols, the effect on reading portion of foreign language exams must be assessed with greater accountability to question writing, analysis, use and to the learner as a test taker.

As Haber and Hershon (1980) claim: "vision is certainly a central one in the understanding of the reading process". It is the process by which written or printed symbols are translated into a representation in which meaning is already accessible - a translation to a form of language from which a reader is able to derive meaning. They argue that "This definition makes clear that the reading process is intimately tied to other language processing, especially the ability to extract meaning from speech". However,

reading is more than printed speech. "The visual components are so different from the auditory ones that reading and listening, while sharing the same language, make very different demands on the information such as the processing skills of the perceiver"(Clark and Clark 1977).

Perhaps this is because studies (Polyak 1968; 1982; Smith 1983; Barlow, Canning, Kawar 2000) suggest that reading require the active search of a text. Meaning cannot be passively obtained. Eye movements are therefore an integral component of the reading process (Sless 1983; Kant 1981;). As one of the researchers explains, 100 words of difficult text may have over 900 character spaces whereas 100 words of easy text might have only 600 characters. Reading speed is 1104 character spaces per minute and 320 syllables per minute as well as 200 words per minute. For college students, reading speeds can be a low as 50 words per minute for very difficult technical material, and as high as 500 to 1000 words per minute for easy novels being read for relaxation (Hersherson 1980). Hersherson further states, "Good readers do not move their eyes more rapidly than poor reader does do nor is movement speed different for easy as compared to difficult text". If this is true, what implications and applications in regards to test writing must designers consider when designing CAT based exams, paper/pencil exams and alternative assessments? How does such information affect examination timings, scrolling down screens, windowing screens information, font size, font color and spacing affect test takers first in their own language and then more importantly in the second language for which they must be assessed? Only future quantitative and qualitative research completed through multiple studies with different population & language groups will offer more information to such unanswered questions.

3.2 Other Considerations for Practical Application in TEFL Test Writing

Test designers must consider redundancy in the visual, such as print, increases the size of the effective field of view. For example, Johnson et al (1989) shows that when subjects are asked to scan a word in order to detect a pre-designated target letter, the strategy they adopt is quite reminiscent of a memory scan, rather than a visual scan, in that they appear to engage in an exhaustive search. The data were interpreted as literally inferring that:

1. Words are processed holistically
2. Such processing is not under the strategic control of the perceiver
3. Component -level letter information can obtain only by deriving it within memory from the word-level representation.
4. Finally it was suggested that usual difference in scan rate obtained between words and non-words may not reflect any direct influence of that factor on the scan rate itself, but rather it may be derivative effect that stems from a difference in the type of scan.

Pezdek, Simon, Soteckert and Kiely (1987) designed two experiments between reading comprehension and visual comprehension using similar materials. It was shown through television media that participants who watched the television had a higher visual and spatial ability as assessed by psychometric test performance and secondly, were more likely to utilize an imagery based strategy in the sentence picture verification task. This research warrants that if these types of tasks are used on exams, that consideration and

greater emphasis be used when creating, implementing and analyzing test data, items and feedback.

Additional factors such as those imposed by the Fleming System must also be considered when interpreting test data and creating item analysis. The Fleming System dictates that all people systematically go through the same sequence of events in order to comprehend a visual image. First the Fleming System suggests that a given learner recalls, recognizes, acknowledges and reproduces a mental picture of the visual input. Second, the learner goes through an analytic period. It is at this point that the learner attempts to separate, identify, and compare the components of the illustration. This includes assessing, judging, describing and/or identifying components of the desired image. The next stage finds the learner trying to combine components, formulate new relationships and generalize information based on the input. In the application stage, the learner attempts to "apply" the visual to a situation. Finally researchers hypothesize that the learner demonstrates a desired interest in the visual.

As stated earlier, it is a biological fact that the eye is not separate from the brain. The eye and brain are part of the same organ (Polyak,1963). Because human beings have evolved to have several distinct intelligence and no one general intelligence, interpretation of visuals and the use of visuals may affect learners in different ways. Studies such as those in the early 1970s at the University of California at Berkley show that the different hemispheres of the brain may affect human learning (Torrence, 1980). Physical perception of what is scene may differ amongst different learners thus allowing a greater range of responses to any given visual. For example if "Learner X" is given a picture the student may be able to interpret how they see the picture and relate it to

language in two distinct ways. First they may use top down visuals to test ideas against facts or solve specific problems. Secondly the learner may use bottom up visuals to scan and organize information with the use of graphics (Canning 1997).

4.0 Positive and Negative Considerations for Incorporating Visuals

Nothing is worse than a crowded test paper with tiny blank spaces in miniature print with some aesthetic picture thrown in to make the text look pretty. Face validity has long been agreed upon as a common denominator on an examination. But, do formats constitute face validity? As educated test writers, we must look beyond the basic concepts, to a deeper level. It has long been proven in areas of psychology and verbal/visual behavior that learners prefer visuals that are colored, contain a story, relate to previous experiences and that can be associated with places, objects, persons, events or animals of which they are familiar. Likewise, they have also shown that if a visual stimulus is suddenly terminated that it remains available in the conscious system only for about a second in detail and that learners prefer time when comprehending a visual. Yet, how are these factors incorporated into exams without great monetary, research and time expense? It is difficult to say exactly, but if one is aware of these factors it is easier to design, create and implement tests which are more theoretically sound.

For example, if as a test writer you know that when a given visual is flashed with time for comprehension and/or is masked with another visual that recognition for the learner can be impaired. It would be recommended to select a picture to enhance language learning and that the visual should be chosen to illustrate the point. The illustrations chosen should make a statement and be comparative. It would be further

recommended that the picture be interpretive and to the point. Thus, using pictures, which are culturally or religiously unfamiliar, would be unfair and yield results that did not accurately reflect a student's knowledge or use of the language.

For example, pictures used on the Acer & Peacock Test, SPEAK Test, Borgotta Test of Visual Response and most listening/aural tests show reasonable judgement in content and often enhance learning, sensory acuteness and the testing situation as a whole.

Test writers must also keep in mind that the following issues have been repeatedly proven to distract learners and test takers; thus hindering learning and skewing test scores (Canning 2001):

1. the use of violent scenes
2. too many distracters
3. too crowded or cause an overwhelming effect of information
4. too small or not clearly defined
5. stereotyped images
6. poor reproduction
7. not related to text
8. irrelevant captioning
9. offers too much information
10. unclear picture which doesn't compliment the text
11. poorly scaled illustration
12. cluttered composition that is not esthetically meaningful

5.0 Suggestions for the Classroom Practitioner and Test Writer

The following suggestions are offered for the classroom practitioner and test writer for creating more selective and theoretically appropriate examinations. Canning (2001) states that careful selection of pictures to elicit answers from students should be chosen. Often she says "pictures are chosen because they are meaningful to the teacher or tester, and not the test taker". Therefore, she suggests that pictures should have a universal appeal and be relevant to the learner. Again, a learner should have been familiar and able to speak on the basics of the picture in his first language. For example, giving an Arab student a picture of a polar bear in an ice field (during a testing situation) would be an unfair practice. The student may be able to speak about the basic diet and habitat, but would not be able to fully expand on the topic without previously learning background-related materials.

6.0 Conclusion

A learner's sensitivity to language and their ability to create relations amongst words can be further enhanced by the use of visuals. Canning (2001) suggests that graphic images can bring out more detailed, knowledgeable, responsive, awareness to the object, situation or text being communicated. Moreover, the use of a picture may lead a learner to more abstract thought as well as the ability to distinguish ideas or to demonstrate greater precision counting organizing skills through the use of logical structure. Overall, bring out a more complex sensitivity in the learner (Canning, 1998).

Pictures help individual learners predict information, infer information, deduce information, and analyze today's world so that it can be brought into today's classroom and offer social settings, which can immerse or expose the learner to new ideas or further promote an already created setting. If a visual is used in a testing or teaching situation it can enhance clarity and give meaning to the text or to the message being communicated. Visuals can serve to create a solid link between the material learned and the practical application of it on a test (Canning, 1998).

The nature of a graphic images serves as a catalyst and stimulus. Moreover, the visual can offer input, output and/or feedback on materials learned. Likewise, a learner using a visual may be more apt to give an added response to the traditionally expected form. The response may change according to the picture in collaboration with the task as it works as an interactive negotiator. Although some practitioners may argue that a picture can serve as an impetus, others would equally argue that the same picture has the potential to urge an opinion (Canning 1998). As teachers manipulate texts daily in lessons, teachers can also control and open a picture to a variety of language learning activities as well as a variety of interpretations.

Visuals allow for greater cognitive mapping and navigating in an environment. The use of visuals can either lead to sensory acuteness or to sensory depravation. In the process, perception becomes the ability to process the stimuli as meaningful to the viewer.

Visuals are a good and useful tool for examination purposes because they lead the learner into drawing out language from their own knowledge and personal experiences through exposure to, immersion to the stimuli presented before them. Visuals permit

strategies to organize knowledge into semantic or associative clusters. In testing and teaching situations pictures items can be developed to test whether the students understands the syntax or structure of the target language. Visuals allow for options, responses, alternative patterns and ranges. Students can see immediate meaning in terms of vocabulary recognition provided the item exists in the first language. Pictures can be developed into a test to see whether the learner understands the structure and the syntax (Canning 1998; 2000).

The advantages of pictures suggest that visuals can help make a task or situation more authentic for test takers. Pictures can help testers and teachers to identify or manipulate structures, vocabulary, functions, situations and skills. Visuals used as testing prompts can be used to measure semantic and associative clusters. Pictures allow students to focus on the whole item or a piece of an item. Pictures can give or not give a context depending on what needs to be tested. Pictures offer test takers options for more interpretive responses, patterns and ranges to answer posited exam questions.
Visual testing and teaching prompts can aid in measuring syntactical, phonological, lexical and cultural proficiency. Perhaps this is because a visual cue may also be accompanied by a written cue to focus a student's attention on the specific lexical unit being furnished. Pictures can force full or partial student production. For example, Visuals may possibly be able to empower test takers to decode information using top-down or bottom-up processes. Top down encoding in the visual process would include the learner testing ideas against facts or solving specific problems by viewing concept maps to relate their ideas to facts or ideas found in a second language text or test. In

contrast, bottom up encoding in the visual process would include using the visual image to help learners to scan, sort and/or organize information in a testing environment.

The use of visual stimuli enables a learner and/or test-taker the ability to predict information, to infer information as well as to deduce information from the picture or mental image. Another beneficial reason for using pictures on examinations is authenticity.

Visuals can bring today's world into the language learning environment by serving as a reflection of what exists outside of the foreign or second language classroom. This form of stimuli can allow the learner to analyze his/her own world and make the examination or alternative assessment become more real for the test-taker. Moreover, visual stimuli can expose as well as immerse the test-taker into a familiar or unfamiliar environment, social setting or practical environment.

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